**Preschooler’s Perceptions of Food as a Possible Factor Related to Childhood Obesity**

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**Introduction**

- Obese children are likely to:
  - stay obese into adulthood
  - develop diabetes and heart disease
  - have shorter life expectancies

- To promote healthy eating habits in children, an understanding of their perceptions of food is key.

**Purpose**

- To identify preschooler’s perceptions of foods, which may aid health professionals/educators in designing developmentally appropriate interventions to prevent and reduce childhood obesity.

**Research Questions**

1) Which foods do preschooler’s like/dislike?
2) Which foods do preschooler’s perceive as healthy/unhealthy?
3) How are preschooler’s likes/dislikes related to their perceptions of foods as healthy or unhealthy?

**Preschool Food Perceptions Measurement Tool (PFPMT)™**

- Developed by the researcher to serve as a quantitative measurement tool for this study
- 6 Healthy items (broccoli, apple, milk, banana, corn, and water)
- 5 Unhealthy items (pizza, hot dog, soda, french fries, and cookie)

**Methodology**

- Comparative, descriptive design
- Setting:
  - 2 Preschools (14 children from each) in Madison County, Alabama.
- Sample
  - 28 Preschoolers (14 girls, 14 boys)
  - Age 4–5 years (4 YO = 16, 5 YO = 12)

**Findings**

**Preschooler’s Food Perceptions**

**Yummy & Good For Me Association**

**Results**

- Chi Square ($X^2$) scores showed:
  - Sig (p=.004) for relationship between taste preference and healthfulness of broccoli
  - Sig (p=.03) for relationship between taste preference and healthfulness of milk
  - Not Sig (p=.09) for relationship between taste preference and healthfulness of pizza
  - Additional $X^2$ scores did not show significant findings

**Discussion**

- Majority of preschoolers responded “yummy” to all food items (except soda)
- Majority of preschoolers responded “good for me” to all food items (except soda and cookie)
- $X^2$ scores showed a significant association between taste preference and healthfulness of broccoli and milk and not significant association of pizza

**Implications**

- Use of the PFPMT™
  - Routine doctor’s office visits
  - School settings
- Association between taste preference and healthfulness should be considered when educating preschoolers on nutrition.
- Further research needs to be conducted using larger samples to obtain more conclusive results regarding the relationship between preschooler’s perception of food item healthfulness and taste preference.